

House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing  
on  
The Rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Americas

November 20, 2020 - 10:00 a.m.  
Virtual via Cisco WebEx

Statement of Melania Canales Poma  
President  
ONAMIAP

"Threats of violence against Indigenous Peoples in Peru."

(Allin puchaw llapaykichikta) Good day to all of you, (Sutiymi) my name is Melania Canales Poma, president of ONAMIAP, we are defenders of our mother earth, our Pachamama, as well as our collective and individual rights, which is like a two-sided coin, that is inseparable.

As it is well known, the extractivist projects (mining and hydrocarbons) that are installed in Latin America and in Peru, when intersected with variables such as gender and ethnicity, increase inequalities and accentuate the violation of the rights of indigenous women, and further strengthen racist and sexist violence.

The economic and political model was based on the unbridled commodification and exploitation of Mother Nature. In Latin America, this issue has deepened since the decade of the nineties, due to the increase in the prices of some minerals in the international markets.

There are multiple and diverse forms of inequality and violence that indigenous women face in these contexts, which are often exercised by governments, by our communities, by our family members, by our partners, and even by other women. The violence that affects our lives covers a wide spectrum, from physical and mental to economic, labor, organizational, domestic, educational, etc. In other words, it affects our individual and collective rights.

We face machismo in our communities when men try to make our proposals and contributions invisible, as well as monopolizing participation and decision-making in relation to our territories.

Extractivism has been destroying and polluting our lands, which no longer produce and no longer guarantee food security and sovereignty. Our rivers which were the source of food through fishing have been polluted as well, impacting the fish and a safe water source for human and animal consumption, as well as for irrigation.

The presence of mining tailings and oil spills have also affected the health of our children with heavy metals in their blood.

To this, the extractive violence is added; governments imposing extractive activities with blood and fire in our collective territories which they take from us legally but also illegally to benefit a group of economic power.

Currently, as an indigenous organization, we have been promoting the Law of the Rights of Mother Earth, because for indigenous peoples Mother Earth is alive, therefore, must be considered as a subject of the law.

We must reflect on our anthropocentrism for a life in harmony, reciprocity, and balance with mother nature and human beings, knowing that everything that affects Mother Earth will also affect humans, as well as thinking about future generations, leaving our selfishness and ambitions as mortal beings.

In the same manner, as an organization of indigenous women, we have the firm intention of promoting processes of change towards good living and this begins by means of a

constitutional assembly: popular, sovereign, plurinational, and equal. This process must be made from the bottom up and not only done by a group of economic power that imposes its hegemony.

In this pandemic, we have been able to see transparently the large inequality gaps despite the fact that our mineral exporting countries and others say that we are a middle-income country and that we are economically well, but nevertheless, the rights to health, education, communication, and others exist only in a speech and in documents, because rights are really a business for the privileged ones, and the vast majority does not have possibilities to obtain them, even more so for indigenous women historically racialized, discriminated against, colonized, belittled and stripped of our collective and individual rights such as the rights to a collective territory, to effective and active participation, to our own form of development, to our autonomy and self-determination. As indigenous women in resistance, we only seek a good living and to defend Mother Nature for future generations, knowing that we are transient.